I. Background

1. The Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System was formally established by the Commission in its decision 45/112, in which it also mandated the group of the United Nations chief statisticians to follow up on the recommendations of the Friends of the Chair for improved coordination and report back to the Commission.[1]

2. The chief statisticians of the United Nations system, who had been meeting informally twice a year since September 2007, constituted themselves in the new, more formal format and met officially for the first time on 10 September 2014, in conjunction with the twenty-fourth session of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, held in Rome.

3. The present document is the first report of the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System to the Statistical Commission. It summarizes the main activities and outputs of the Committee since its establishment.

II. Membership and working methods

4. The Committee comprises the statistical services of United Nations funds and programmes, United Nations specialized agencies and the United Nations Secretariat, as well as the regional economic and social commissions, the mandates of which include the provision of international official statistics in the context of the principles governing international statistical activities. A full list of current members is contained in annex I to the present report.

5. As a first step, the group developed formal terms of reference, which consisted of a mission statement and a description of key activities and functions and working modalities. The terms of reference were formally adopted by the Committee at its 5th session in the fall 2016 and can be found in annex II to the present report.

6. In addition to holding two annual sessions, the Committee works actively between sessions through task teams, following up on the decisions taken during the regular session. The task teams prepare documents on progress made and the results of their work and report to the Committee to enable decision-making at its regular sessions. As the secretariat of the Committee, the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat works closely with the Chair, facilitates communication among Committee members and prepares the reports on the regular sessions. It is also currently constructing a public webpage for the Committee, which will be hosted on the Division website.

7. The Committee operates in close collaboration with the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, which convenes the international, regional and supranational organizations that are not part of the United Nations system, in order to address broader matters and issues regarding the entire global statistical system.

[1] See E/CN.3/2014/13.

III. Data and indicators for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

8. The Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System, like the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, receives regular briefings during its meetings on the development of an indicator framework for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular regarding the supporting role of international organizations, such as the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators and the High Level Group in the various processes.

9. The Committee contributed to the work on the selection of indicators for the global indicator framework by submitting a coordinated proposal for the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators to consider at its 2nd session, in October 2015. This coordination effort had the advantage of reducing the overall number of proposed indicators and improving metadata documentation, aspects which were appreciated by Group members.

10. The Committee initiated work on suggested guidelines and principles for data reporting and data sharing within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The work is meant to clarify the modalities in which the data flows on SDG indicators between national statistical agencies and international organizations should be organized, in order to reduce the burden on reporting countries. The initiative is now being carried forward in collaboration with the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, and a dedicated task team has been established with the objective of preparing a document to be discussed at the High Level Forum on Official Statistics, to be held the day before the start of the forty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission (see E/CN.3/2017/28, para. 8).

11. The Committee also continued to stay informed about the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for Statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the planned United Nations World Data Forum, the Global Action Plan and the work being undertaken on the Transformative Agenda. Ten Committee members contributed to the global consultation for the Global Action Plan, which was conducted in November 2016.

IV. Generic United Nations statistical quality assurance framework

12. Achieving and maintaining public trust in official statistics requires that those statistics be produced in an objective, transparent and professionally independent manner. The Statistical Commission preserved these and other important principles in 1994 when it adopted a set of Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. Many countries around the world have adopted a national code of practice and/or a statistical quality assurance framework to capture and implement the Principles, and to safeguard public trust. To support the development statistical quality assurance frameworks, the Statistics Division produced a generic national quality assurance framework, comprising a template and guidelines, that is designed to assist

countries in developing their particular frameworks. It has been endorsed by the Statistical Commission and is widely referenced.

13. For international organizations producing statistics, the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities in 2005 adopted the principles governing international statistical activities,[2] which enshrines principles similar to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (see paras. 16 and 17). In order to create a common understanding of the quality dimensions and quality assurance relevant for all United Nations entities, the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, with the assistance of a consultant and a task team lead by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, drafted the United Nations Statistical Quality Assurance Framework, which will be available to the Commission in a background document. The Framework, which is the United Nations equivalent of national statistical quality assurance frameworks, presents a generic framework that can be adapted to the specific circumstances of an individual United Nations entity.

14. Several United Nations entities have already developed and implemented their own statistical quality assurance frameworks, in particular the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Telecommunication Union and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization. To facilitate the development and implementation of such frameworks by other United Nations entities, the United Nations Statistical Quality Assurance Framework includes a framework referred to as the generic statistical quality assurance framework. This framework is modelled on the national framework template and guidelines, but tailored to the circumstances of United Nations entities rather than national statistical organizations.

15. Overall, the United Nations Statistical Quality Assurance Framework is aimed at promoting a statistical quality culture across the United Nations statistical system and at providing material for establishing individual such frameworks in United Nations entities.

V. Principles governing international statistical activities

16. The Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities endorsed the principles governing international statistical activities in September 2005 and reaffirmed them in a revised preamble in March 2014. In 2016, the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities adopted the new version of the good practices.[3] All members of the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System have individually signed off on the principles governing international statistical activities and committed to their implementation. Among the initiatives undertaken to that end, members have published the principles on their website and have promoted awareness campaigns for the staff of their organization.

17. In the light of the importance of the principles for members, in particular in the context of data reporting and data sharing within the context of the follow-up to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the

[2] See http://unstats.un.org/unsd/accsub-public/principles_stat_activities.htm.
[3] See E/CN.3/2017/28, paras. 13-14.

Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System decided to bring the principles to the attention of its principals. On the initiative of the Committee, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, in its second regular session of 2015, noted the following:

> Data, especially data disaggregated by gender, age, race, disability and other dimensions, were crucial to delivering on the 2030 Agenda, including by facilitating effective localization and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals. To ensure that the United Nations system took a consistent approach to producing high-quality statistics for analysis and decision-making, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs urged the agencies to adhere to the principles governing international statistical activities to which the chief statisticians and principal coordinators of statistical activities within the system and in other international organizations had committed in 2005.[4]

VI. Other topics considered

18. Other topics discussed by the newly establish Committee over the past two years included the possible follow-up and implementation of the recommendations contained in the document entitled "Evaluation of the contribution of the United Nations development system to strengthening national capacities for statistical analysis and data collection to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals" (JIU/REP/2016/5).

VII. Future workplan

19. The Committee will continue to coordinate in all areas mentioned above. Special attention in future sessions will be given to the coordination of common capacity-building and technical assistance activities to support countries in meeting the new data requirements derived from the global monitoring framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Increased efforts will also be dedicated to promoting joint data collection activities and the sharing of statistics among its members, in order to reduce the burden on reporting countries. The Committee will undertake coordination in other areas as needed.

VIII. Conclusion

20. The Commission is invited to take note of the work of the Committee.

[4] CEB/2015/2, para. 86.

Annex I

List of members

Economic Commission for Africa

Economic Commission for Europe

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

International Atomic Energy Agency

International Civil Aviation Organization

International Labour Organization

International Telecommunication Union

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Statistics Division

United Nations Children's Fund

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

United Nations Development Programme

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

United Nations Environment Programme

United Nations Human Settlements Programme

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

United Nations Population Division

United Nations Population Fund

Universal Postal Union

World Health Organization

World Tourism Organization

Annex II

Terms of reference of the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System

I. Background

1. The first meeting of United Nations entities on statistical programmes was held on 9 September 2007 in Madrid, on the margins of the tenth session of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities. Since then, the group has met regularly twice a year, once in the spring on the occasion of the annual session of the Statistical Commission and once during the autumn on the occasion of the fall session of CCSA.

2. The Statistical Commission considered the coordination of statistical activities in the United Nations system during the 43rd, 44th and 45th sessions (see decisions 45/112, 44/112 and 43/112). In decision 45/112 the Commission "endorsed the proposal that the United Nations chief statisticians hold regular meetings, and mandated the group to follow up on the recommendations of the Friends of the Chair for improved coordination and report back to the Commission."

3. In accordance with the decision of the Commission, the Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System was formally established on 10 September 2014. Since then, it has held regular meetings and reported on their outcomes to the Commission. This document describes the mission, key activities and working modalities of the Committee.

II. Mission statement

4. The Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System promotes coherent and integrated system-wide United Nations actions to support statistics at the national, regional and international levels, following the principles governing international statistical activities, adopted by the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities in 2005, and the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, adopted by the General Assembly in 2015. Taking into account the comparative advantages of each member, the Committee encourages coordinated efforts by United Nations agencies and programmes in strengthening national statistical capacity through the definition of common approaches and joint interventions. The Committee supports in particular the modernization of national statistical systems and the reinforcement of their capacity to respond to new data demands for underpinning evidence-based policymaking, including the monitoring of global, regional and national development goals. Recognizing that national needs and priorities should guide the United Nations system's efforts to support national statistical systems, the Committee supports the development and full implementation of international statistical standards in member States for the production of high-quality and internationally comparable data.

5. The Committee promotes the coordination of the statistical programmes of the United Nations system entities with the aim of "delivering as one", by fostering

synergies, avoiding duplication and overlap, and facilitating data exchange. It promotes the adoption of common quality criteria to drive the statistical production of all agencies of the United Nations system and supports the sharing of knowledge and good practices. It also defines common United Nations positions on statistical matters, to be reported at the Statistical Commission or at other coordination bodies, such as the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities.

III. Key activities and functions

6. The Committee of the Chief Statisticians of the United Nations System establishes a network of statistical programmes in the United Nations system to enhance cooperation and coordination when helping Member States to improve their statistical capacity. The network also assists its members by defining solutions to common problems faced when managing or implementing regional or global statistical programmes.

7. The Committee promotes the use of harmonized international statistical standards and classifications and the implementation of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. It helps to promote accountability by improving the transparency of statistical practices globally.

8. The Committee defines and promotes the implementation of a common United Nations data quality framework to ensure that all United Nations agencies apply the same high level of transparency, accuracy, timeliness and efficiency when collecting, processing and disseminating statistics. It also adopts common policies to ensure national ownership of the data disseminated by United Nations agencies while maximizing their comparability and adherence to international standards.

9. The Committee discusses ways of coordinating activities at the national level through United Nations country teams and national programmes by sharing and promoting coherence and producing joint products.

10. The Committee promotes the coordination of common capacity-building and technical assistance activities by undertaking common actions on specific topics, at the national, regional and global levels, to meet more efficiently the demand for skilled statisticians and data analysts, for both Member States and international organizations.

11. The Committee promotes coordinated data compilation and exchange to reduce the burden on reporting countries by promoting joint data collection activities and the sharing of statistics and facilitating the use of modern platforms and mechanisms to provide countries with the best solutions and access to databases.

12. The Committee provides common positions and statements on statistical matters to the Statistical Commission in order to provide Member States with a single and coherent view from the United Nations.

13. The Committee enhances visibility and support to regional and global statistical activities within the United Nations system by promoting, among senior United Nations management personnel, the relevance of statistics and the ethical principles related thereto. This includes the involvement of the High-level

Committee on Programmes, the High-level Committee on Management and, through them, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. The Committee also promotes the coordination of national statistical systems through the various constituencies at the national and global levels.

14. The Committee discusses and contributes to the debates on international global frameworks and monitoring systems such as the Sustainable Development Goals and others in order to achieve a better division of work and ensure quality in statistical outcomes.

15. The Committee discusses emerging topics related to new technical challenges, new data sources and ways of disseminating data, and changes in United Nations donors' strategies in order to achieve better results and enhance the statistical activities carried out by the various agencies, organizations, funds and programmes.

16. The Committee promotes the cross-fertilization of innovative ideas and best practices on methodology, statistical sources and assistance to Member States. It also discusses administrative and substantive solutions to facilitate the mobility of statisticians across the United Nations system, and the implementation of joint actions in line with the rules and regulations of United Nations agencies.

IV. Working modalities

A. Membership and level of representation

17. The Committee comprises the statistical services of United Nations funds and programmes, specialized agencies and the Secretariat, as well as the regional economic and social commissions, the mandates of which include the provision of international official statistics in the context of the principles governing international statistical activities.

18. Prospective members should register with the secretariat.

19. Representation in meetings is expected to be at the level of director of an organization's statistical service or the equivalent.

B. Organization

20. The Committee elects a chairperson, who will serve for a two-year period and is eligible for re-election for a second two-year term. The chairperson may be identical to the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities co-chair representing the United Nations members of that Committee, to ensure close coordination with the activities of that Committee.

21. The functions of the chairperson are the following:

(a) To design the draft agenda with the support of the secretariat, on the basis of the decisions taken at the previous session and on subsequent requests by members;

(b) To chair the sessions of the Committee, including by preparing a summary of the discussion of each agenda item as a basis for the report of the

session; in the absence of the chairperson during a scheduled session of the Committee, the chair shall be temporarily assumed by another member;

(c) To propose draft minutes of the sessions, as prepared by the secretariat, to be approved by written procedure by all the members who attended the session;

(d) To represent the Committee in strategic meetings or discussions whenever its members consider it necessary;

(e) To invite, after consultation and in agreement with the members, observers to participate in the work of Committee.

22. The secretariat of the Committee is situated at the Statistics Division.

23. The functions of the secretariat are the following:

(a) To prepare the draft agenda in collaboration with the chairperson and following consultation with members;

(b) To ensure that all documentation is made available to its members in a timely fashion;

(c) To organize the sessions of the Committee and coordinate with the agreed host of a given session;

(d) To prepare draft minutes of each session in cooperation with the chairperson, to be approved by written procedure by all the members who attended the session;

(e) To create, host and keep up-to-date a protected website for the Committee;

(f) To prepare the draft report to the Statistical Commission for approval by the members.

C. Meetings, decisions, minutes and reporting

24. The Committee will meet twice a year. The first session will take place every spring in New York on the margins of the session of the Statistical Commission ("spring session"), and the second session will place on the margins of the autumn session of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities ("fall session"), at the venue chosen for that session. The exact timing and length of the sessions will be decided by the chairperson, in consultation with the members, upon proposal of the secretariat. The draft agenda is prepared by the chairperson, with assistance provided by the secretariat and in consultation with members, on the basis of decisions taken at the previous session and subsequent requests by members.

25. The coordination of activities between sessions, for example, through electronic discussion groups, is an important and integral part of the work of the Committee.

26. Consensus during sessions is determined by the chairperson and reported in the minutes of the session. A report on decisions and actions is prepared, in a timely

manner, for adoption after each session by the secretariat. The report specifies the lead agencies responsible for any action or follow-up.

27. The Committee reports at least every two years to the Statistical Commission. Such reports are drafted by the secretariat, under the guidance of the chairperson, and approved by the members.